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BLM Alaska
FRONTIERS

News about BLM-managed public lands in Alaska

ISSUE 87 WINTER 2002

White Mountains NRA added to BLM's national conservation system

On October 2, BLM Director Kathleen Clarke officially added the White Mountains National Recreation Area to the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS).

BLM recreation planner Bill Overbaugh reacted positively to the announcement stating, "This should lead to higher quality visitor services, enhanced interpretion, better maintenance of trails and facilities, and most likely, greater public benefit and satisfaction with their recreational experience."

The White Mountains NRA, created in 1981 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, is a one-million-acre area northeast of Fairbanks known originally for its system of winter trails and cabins. In recent years BLM has developed access and facilities for summer recreation as well.

Dennis R. Green

Beaver Creek and the White Mountains, two of many features in the NRA.

In June 2000, BLM responded to growing concern over the loss of open space by creating the NLCS, bringing the agency's premier areas into a single system. These include national monuments, conservation areas, wild and scenic rivers, national historic and scenic trails, wilderness areas and wilderness study areas. BLM hopes to increase the public awareness of these areas' scientific, cultural, educational, ecological and other values. All the units in the NLCS comprise lands that were already under federal management. In addition, the NLCS does not create any new legal protections as BLM continues to manage the units at the local level. Tom Edgerton has been recently named manager for the NRA. There are more than 800 units in the NLCS, most in the western states.

Want to know more? It's on the web: www.aurora.ak.blm.gov/WhiteMtns/html. For NLCS information: www.blm.gov/nlcs.

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One HOT Summer

Dry conditions kept crews busy in Alaska and Lower 48

The Geskamina Lake Fire was Alaska's largest of the season, totalling about 258,000 acres.

If you think this past summer was long, hot and dry, you are right. And hundreds of Alaska firefighters will agree with you. The 2002 season was the fifth largest on record in Alaska with 2,226,000 acres burned.* It was the largest year for fires since 1990, when 3.2 million acres burned.

Pat Houghton, who helps track fires for the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC) as a fire intelligence specialist, said he does not believe the records include a season that got off to a busier start than 2002.

The season began on May 17, about a week after warm, high pressure moved in over central Alaska, with a fire near Kenai. During the next two days, 46 fires were reported to the AICC, eight of them were in the Kenai/Kodiak area and 26 in the Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna area.

Early fires also included the Vinesale Fire south of McGrath and the Milepost 78 Fire southwest of Livengood. The Vinesale Fire burned actively throughout the summer and grew to nearly 210,000 acres. The Milepost 78 Fire burned until the snow fell, covering 115,000 acres. On May 23 the MP 78 Fire began a spectacular run past the Tolovana Hot Springs which was protected by Alaska Smokejumpers when the flames came through.

The West Fork Chena Fire also contributed to the busy spring season. The fire escaped from a subdivision near the end of the road on May 23 and grew to nearly 10,000 acres during the next two days. A Type 2 Incident Management Team was assigned to the fire. It was the first of eight Type 2 Teams activated during the season.

Lightning entered the stage on May 26, starting five fires around McGrath. By the end of May, the AICC reported 264 fires statewide had burned about 370,000 acres.

By June 8, 19 lightning-caused fires were burning in Alaska. Seven of those fires were active throughout the season.

The Geskakmina Lake Fire became the largest fire of the season, eventually burning 257,549 acres. After escaping initial attack, it began a major run on June 16, quickly developing a three-mile front with continuous crowning in the black spruce. Dozens of remote cabins were located on lakes and rivers near the fire. Smokejumpers and fire specialists spent most of the summer moving from site to site, setting up and activating sprinkler systems and burning vegetation when needed to protect property.

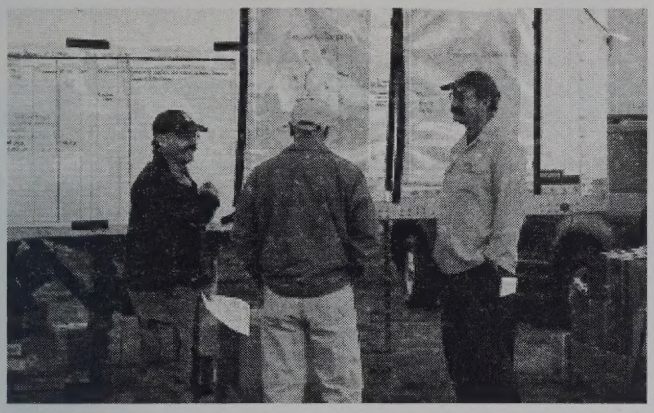
Fire Management Officer Ed Strong, whose Tanana Zone included the Geskamina Fire, the MP 78 Fire, and two other fires of over 100,000 acres, said the helicopter shuttle was successful in protecting cabin sites, though smoke was a major obstacle in moving firefighters around.

By the end of June, 353 fires had burned 821,000 acres. By the end of July, the figures were 505 fires and 1.1 million acres.

In normal years, Alaska's fire season ends in July. A low-pressure system moves up from the Aleutians into the Bering Sea. This sets up a southwest air flow which brings moisture to most of the fire-prone areas. But by the end of July of 2002, only half the acreage for the season had burned.

Instead of widespread rain showers, warm weather set in again at the end of July. A few days later temperatures reached the low 90s on many of the fires across the Interior. The weather produced the most intense burning of the summer. By Aug. 7, when scattered rain showers began to make headway from the east, the AICC Situation Report showed 1.7 million acres burned, though smoke still interfered with accurate mapping.

On Aug. 5 the AICC raised the Preparedness Level to 5, the first time it has been at its highest level since the Millers Reach Fire in 1997. The level remained at 5 until Aug. 8.



Operations Chief Rex McKnight (left) **and Incident Commander David Dash** (right) **discuss tactics during the Alaska Type 1 Team's assignment to the Canyons Complex fire south of Moab, Utah this summer.**

Alaskans help battle Lower 48 fires

Alaska's Type 1 Interagency Incident Management Team traveled south three times this year to manage fires in the Lower 48. The Team, which includes about 40 of Alaska's most experienced wildland fire managers, was called first to the Chediski Fire in Arizona, then to the Canyons Complex in Utah, and finally to the Biscuit Fire in Oregon. The assignments were from June 21 to July 10 on the Chediski Fire, July 16 to July 27 on the Canyons Complex, and Aug. 25 to Sept. 9 on the Biscuit.

The Alaska team is one of 16 Type 1 teams in the nation. The teams are organized under the national Incident Command System and respond to the largest, most complex wildfires and other emergency situations.

Incident Commander David Dash said altogether, the teams had 85 assignments on fires this year. "It was a busy season both in Alaska and in the Lower 48," he said.

Dash said the three assignments showed that versatility was one of the Alaska team's strengths. "The team adapted to different circumstances extremely well," he said. Dash is Chief of Fire Operations with the Alaska Fire Service.

In addition to the Geskakmina Fire, suppression activity was focused on the Ketchem Creek Fire near Circle Hot Springs, the North Fork Fire near Medfra 25 miles northeast of McGrath, and the Reindeer Fire near Holy Cross.

Alaska's busy fire season was combined with a very busy season in the Lower 48. Three of the four Alaska Type 1 crews spent two weeks on fires in the Southwest in May. All four crews left again on June 14 and did not return for the rest of the season. Alaska's Type 1 Interagency Incident Management Team, was sent on three assignments (see accompanying story).

In all, the AICC sent 38 crews and 590 other personnel from Alaska to fires in the Lower 48, while ordering 325 people for fires here. Emergency firefighter wages for 2002 totaled $7.5 million.

—Andy Williams

*1955 was the first year that reliable records were kept to estimate the annual acreage burned by wildland fires in Alaska. Since then, acres burned in a season have varied from less than 8,000 acres to more than 5 million.

fire.ak.blm.gov

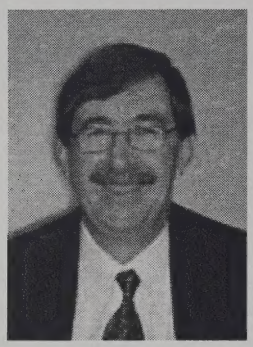
Ten Largest Fires in Alaska in 2002

Fire	Zone/Area	Started	Cause	Acres in Size
1. Geskakmina Lake	Tanana Zone	6/08	L	258,000
2. Reindeer	Southwest Area	7/17	L	227,000
3. Vinesale	Southwest Area	5/22	H	209,000
4. Yetna River	Galena Zone	7/18	L	162,000
5. Sischu	Tanana Zone	6/05	L	129,000
6. Moose Lake	Tanana Zone	7/17	L	118,000
7. Milepost 78	Tanana Zone	5/23	H	115,000
8. Colorado Creek	Southwest Area	5/26	L	88,900
9. Windy	Southwest Area	7/17	L	69,500
10. Spurs	Military Lands Zone	5/15	H	64,900

H-Human, L-Lightning

The New Boss

Alaska State Director Henri Bisson gets his dream job steering BLM on its multiple use mission in Alaska



BLM's new state director for Alaska, Henri Bisson, arrived in Alaska in July. Bisson brought with him a wealth of experience gathered in a variety of positions and locations throughout BLM during his 28-year career. Since 1998 he was the assistant director for renewable resources and planning in Washington D.C. overseeing programs such as fisheries, cultural resources, recreation and land use planning. He also worked on specific Alaska program and budget issues during another tour in Washington from 1982-1986.

Bisson began his career with degrees in forestry and watershed management, rising through the ranks and gaining experience in land use planning, mining operations, oil and gas leasing, and pipelines. He has also worked as a front line district manager in Riverside, California, and in Phoenix "where we had at the time one of the largest land exchange programs in the bureau."

Why should the public care about BLM and the lands it manages in Alaska?

BLM has a lot of land in Alaska—about 85 million acres. Even after all our conveyances are completed, BLM will retain one of the largest land bases in the state. These lands have a significant percentage of the recreation, wildlife, and energy values of interest to Alaskans. They also provide opportunities for sports hunting and federal subsistence fishing and hunting. BLM-managed public lands are part of the fabric of Alaska life and an important economic engine in this state.

What is your general management philosophy?

I am strongly oriented to BLM's multiple use mission. We are about protecting public resources but also managing public resources that local economies need to survive.

I like the challenge of making things happen. I like the challenge of working with people outside the organization. There are some challenges unique to Alaska. Take subsistence. Serving as a member of the Federal Subsistence Board will be a challenging responsibility given how important this is to so many Alaskans. Or on a smaller scale, look at that polar bear situation recently in Barrow where we worked with local government to deal with an unusual safety issue—only in Alaska!

What do you see as BLM's priorities in Alaska?

The priorities for BLM Alaska are the completion of the environmental impact statement for the renewal of the right-of-way for the trans-Alaska pipeline so the Secretary of the Interior can make a decision, and second, the completion of an environmental impact statement for the northwest corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, another project highly visible with the administration in Washington.

Third, I want to improve the efficiency of the conveyance program. I want our conveyance obligations completed on time and on schedule. We are doing some creative thinking right now trying to come up with some ways we can accelerate the schedule.

I also want BLM to look for opportunities to resolve outdated segregations especially ones that may be holding back resource use. We will be working with the mineral community through our Resource Advisory Council to set up some pilot projects sometime next year.

How do you plan to use the BLM Resource Advisory Council? And which issues are the council most interested in?

The RAC will be a good sounding board to see what people think and to help us find different approaches. The members represent a range of interests and are leaders in their communities. We will take proposals to them and ask their advice. Or we may ask them to set up subcommittees to develop proposals for us to consider.

Anytime we have to make a difficult decision, it is enhanced by seeking opinions of people of diverse interests. The council is drafting a specific work plan for next year. One thing I want them to do is to develop some ideas on how to unravel the withdrawal issue. They also can help get the public involved in upcoming land use plans.

This summer, State Director Henri Bisson (second from right) escorted Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Rebecca Watson (third from left) to visit a BLM survey crew working along the Yukon River.

There has been a new emphasis, both politically and budget-wise, in creating healthy forests through techniques such as fuel reduction. What is BLM doing to reduce fire hazards in Alaska?

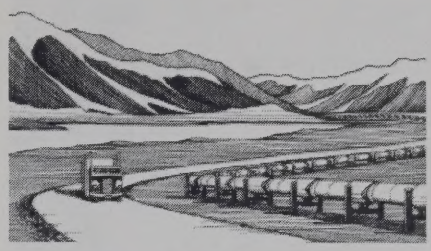
I want the Alaska Fire Service to help us make sure we incorporate our fuels management treatment goals in our land use plans so we have a cohesive strategy in place. I also want our fuels treatment specialists available in the field to work with adjacent land owners to see where we can cooperate to reduce fire hazards. We have completed some great projects in the Glennallen and Anchorage areas.

What else will the public be hearing about from BLM in the coming year?

Our minerals program has expanded dramatically in the last few years so we are reinstating our Division of Energy and Minerals as a separate organizational unit effective November 4. I hope this will enhance our minerals program and focus more attention on what needs to be done with our minerals issues, particularly those arising from our federal onshore leasing.

You have told employees that coming to Alaska as state director fulfills a long-held dream. What is it about the 49th state that you find so intriguing?

I've always been interested in Alaska. The state has a lure of its own. But my interest increased significantly after I came up here several times from Washington on some field visits. Before I got the job of state director I had been here to look at mining issues in the Fortymile, toured the White Mountains via snowmachine, stayed overnight at a drill site in NPR-A to learn about the winter exploration program, and attended some briefings on BLM's science program at the Bering Glacier. So I came into this job with good basis for understanding Alaska issues. Right now I'm a sponge, learning as much as I can as fast as I can.



Public speaks out on pipeline renewal

BLM wrapped up public hearings and the public comment period on the DEIS in late August. Argonne National Laboratory, contractor for the EIS, reported that it received 589 messages, letters or individual testimonies. These resulted in 2,647 individual comments. Of the 589 comments, 155 of them were from people who commented at the seven public hearings, including the individuals who spoke at more than one hearing. Fax campaigns yielded 186 comments, seven were unique.

The comments are categorized into 14 areas. The numbers reflect both pro and con comments:

- Request for comment period extension, 99
- Biology, human health and or safety, 81
- Request for citizens advisory council, 121
- Cumulative impacts, 54
- Economics, 141
- Editorial, 16
- Infrastructure/waste, 32
- Mitigation, 91
- Operations/design, 80
- Physical sciences, 77
- Policy/National Environmental Policy Act, 493
- Sociocultural, 141
- Spills, 145
- Subsistence, 139

BLM and Argonne are currently preparing the Final EIS (FEIS) to address public comments and drafting responses to each comment.

The FEIS is scheduled to be released to the public on November 26. Consistent with federal laws, BLM's Record of Decision and signing of a federal renewal of the ROW grant for TAPS is projected to follow no earlier than December 30.

—Donna Gindle

www.tapseis.anl.gov

Bering Glacier is a Cool School

Dennis R. Green

If you've lived in Alaska long enough, the month of July usually conjures images of rain. Well, for the past six years, July has meant more than rain to researchers studying the Bering Glacier.

This year, the BLM operated its research camp at the Bering Glacier from July 15-August 15 where scientists and educators from universities and agencies studied the glacier's botany, geology, fisheries and wildlife. Known as the largest glacier in North America, measuring 118 miles long and 2,200 square miles, the Bering Glacier just southeast of Cordova is revealing a wealth of scientific information.

Initial findings reveal diverse flora and fauna and sensitive wildlife and fish species. But this doesn't surprise project leader John Payne who had long suspected the uniqueness of the Bering Glacier. He says, "Not many places can match its biological and physical attributes. 18,000-foot mountains, the Gulf of Alaska and prevailing winds all help makes this a special ecoregion."

BLM took a closer look at the Bering in 1994 when the glacier was going through one of its surges. The BLM decided to partner with the USGS and help monitor the glacier's movements. The glacier has a history of short-lived surges lasting 18 to 36 months with the last surge beginning in 1993 and ending in 1995. By 1995 BLM was using remote sensing imagery to monitor the advances and retreats of the glacier. Currently, the glacier is in rapid retreat, which is ideal for research.

(right) **Chris Noyles (BLM) observing some of the unique ice layers near Berg Lake.**

When the USGS vacated its research camp in 1997, BLM took over and began to get serious about research. BLM expanded its remote sensing applications to identify areas of waterfowl habitat. The forelands of the Bering Glacier and the Copper River Delta are important waterfowl and shorebird nesting and staging areas. Dusky geese populations are currently being studied through a partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Alaska Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service. DNA studies on the dusky has led researchers to conclude the birds at the Bering Glacier are a separate population from the Copper River Delta area. The Bering Glacier population only numbers about 5 percent of the total population of about 7,000 birds.

Eager to further expand studies in the glacier area, Payne, who is also BLM's state wildlife program manager, entered into agreements with four universities—the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA), the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF), the University of Michigan and the University of Iowa. UAA has the largest presence at the glacier. This summer, UAA had four of the

(left) **The towering face of Bering Glacier provides a dramatic backdrop for Alaska's coolest school, now attracting educators from around the country.**
(right) **University of Alaska-Anchorage graduate student Danielle Savarese observing harbor seal behavior.**

Scot Guyer

Dennis R. Green

eight groups at the glacier doing botany, geology, fisheries and harbor seal studies.

The UAA's plant inventory group collected plant specimens in and around the Robinson Mountains and the forelands of the Bering Glacier with the hopes of getting a better understanding of plant biodiversity and range. About 20 percent of Alaska's plant species are found there. After two years of surveys, indications are the area may be designated as a scientific place of prominence.

A UAA fisheries graduate student working with others from the University of Michigan College of Marine Engineering evaluated the geochemistry and bathometry* of the area's water, mapped the glacial-fed lakes, measured the water quality, and studied the fish of the region. The water chemistry and the bathometry data produced some surprises, and the fisheries surveys revealed the existence of dwarf Dolly Varden at Berg Lake.

The UAA harbor seal group was the newest team at the glacier this summer. Researchers discovered that large populations of harbor seals use the ice bergs produced by the retreating glacier. The ice "haul out" is one of the largest ever observed in Alaska.

The seal group captured 12 male harbor seals, took blood samples and outfitted them with transmitters. The seals' movements are being monitored and the analysis of their blood and diet should give researchers some idea of why their numbers are so great.

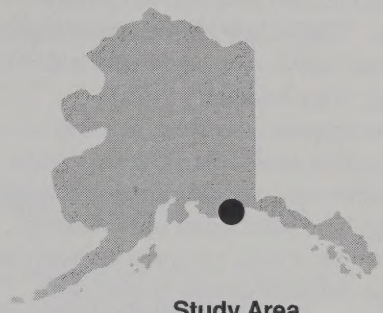
Although he's partial to scientific discoveries, Payne is being very specific about the people he recruits to work at the glacier. "They have to agree to share their information with one another," he says. So much of their work affects each other. For example the bathymetric readings and optical transparency surveys of Berg and Vitus lakes done by the University of Michigan team is especially important to the harbor seal and fisheries team. It is believed that the complex bathymetry of these lakes control biological diversity, iceberg migration, water currents and sediment loading interaction could affect harbor seals, fisheries and other wildlife.

The future of research at the Bering looks bright. Payne is hopeful that two grants will be awarded sometime this year. A grant of $750,000 from the National Science Foundation means there would be money to operate the camp for two years, and for the entire period of three months during the summer instead of the customary one month field season. Another grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation would mean $100,000 to further investigate local soil and plants. Either way there is much excitement and commitment, and so much more work to be done at the Bering Glacier.

–Danielle Allen

Dennis R. Green

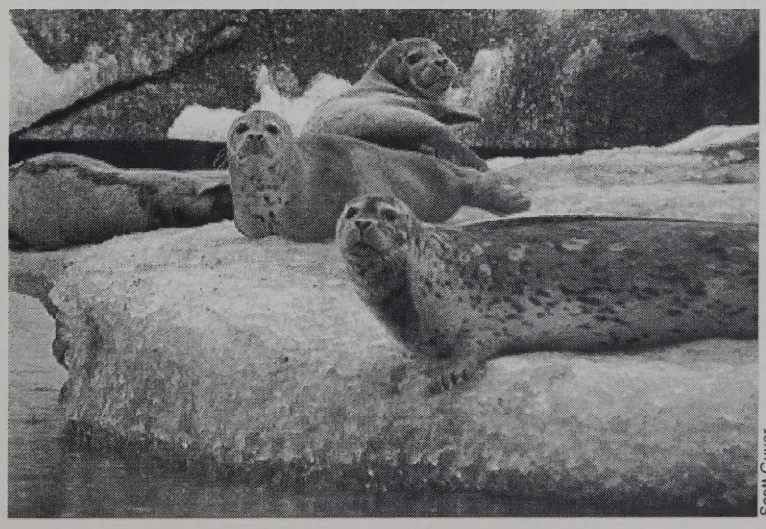
University of Alaska-Anchorage student Heidi Wagner samples lakes and streams for fish diversity.



Study Area

*bathometry. The study of the dymanics of water depth and temperatures.

Researchers have discovered that a large population of harbor seals haul out on icebergs at Vitus Lake.



Scott Guyer

Counting the elusive harlequin

Biologist makes annual pilgrimage to wild river to track duck migrations

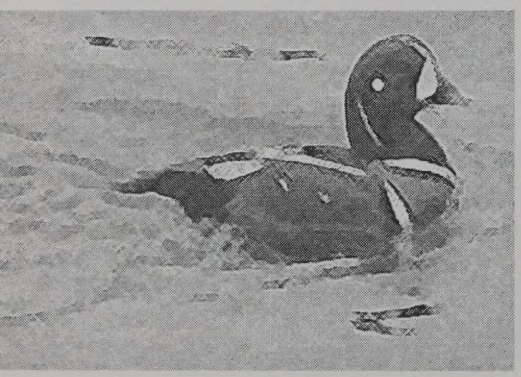
Each May harlequin ducks leave their winter homes along Alaska coastlines to head inland and set up light housekeeping. When this happens, BLM biologist Bruce Seppi isn't far behind.

The Unalakleet River in northwest Alaska is one destination of newly-paired sea ducks seeking the perfect place to start a family. So each spring Seppi packs his gear and heads to the Unalakleet to count harlequins as a means of tracking the numbers and movement of these compact and colorful sea ducks.

"Timing is crucial because we see harlequin pairs at Unalakleet for only about 10-14 days," explains Seppi. "Once they select a nesting site and settle down to rear their young, they basically vanish."

During the breeding season, harlequins seek fast-flowing rivers and streams to build nests and rear young. The ducklings play among the rapids which sometimes become escape habitat as the young take unexpected whitewater trips. This penchant for fast-flowing rivers and streams is unique to the harlequin; most ducks prefer less precarious homesites.

According to biologists, after mating the male harlequin returns to the coast to molt, leaving the female to rear the young. Females aren't as colorful as their male counterparts, which makes them difficult to spot when they settle down to brood along streams and rivers.



BLM biologist Bruce Seppi checks prime wildlife habitat in western Alaska.

If harlequins are so elusive, why do biologists spend time and funds to track and monitor the species? There are two distinct populations of harlequin ducks in North America. The eastern population once numbered upwards of 10,000; today this population consists of roughly 1,500 ducks.

The numbers of western harlequin ducks are thought to be significantly higher, but studies in British Columbia indicate those numbers may be declining. One study conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service in the Strait of Georgia near Vancouver Island notes: "The combination of human stresses on breeding, molting, and wintering habitat may be taking their toll on the western harlequin duck population."

This is why scientists like Seppi actively study western harlequins in Alaska to identify which rivers and streams support breeding populations. Knowing where harlequins nest and breed can help agencies come up with ways to avoid or minimize impacts to duck habitat.

"Harlequins are considered a sensitive species," explains Seppi. "At present, the numbers of western harlequins appear to be stable. That's how we want it to stay." Seppi's data from annual counts will be used to study population trends and may one day factor into what activities are allowed on the wild and scenic river when BLM prepares a river management plan.

The Unalakleet is one of six rivers in Alaska managed by BLM under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. These rivers are known for their free-running, clear waters and limited shoreline access which preserves the natural qualities of the rivers. This makes them prime habitat for sea ducks like the harlequin.

And this is why Seppi spent the first weekend in June flying the Unalakleet via helicopter with clipboard in hand craning to spot these colorful seabirds. "Because it was breeding season, most were paired," Seppi explains. "We flew the entire drainage and counted about 30

pairs. We're pleased because this isn't an abundant duck in this area."

Seppi says male harlequins are fairly easy to distinguish from other sea ducks. Their brightly-colored plumage is often a brilliant blue with bold accents. They have distinctive markings on the face, with a bright patch of white between the eyes and white ear patches. The harlequin's name hails from the colorful costumes worn by medieval court jesters.

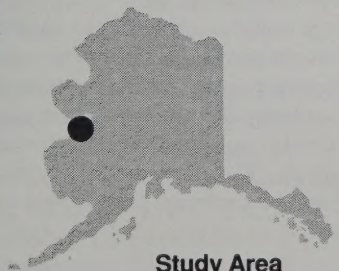
Visitors to Alaska's rivers and streams who spot this colorful duck are indeed fortunate. Which is why Seppi and other biologists conduct annual bird counts, helping to ensure that populations of harlequins and other bird species remain stable. But they need your help.

"We want people to visit and enjoy Alaska's wild and scenic rivers," says Seppi. "But there are things you can do to make your visit less stressful for the birds that live there."

Seppi recommends visitors keep a reasonable distance from nesting birds and use binoculars or a spotting scope for a closer look. Consider using a canoe or raft instead of a powerboat. The waters of the Unalakleet are Class I, perfect for a leisurely day of bird watching. Leave plants, minerals, wildlife, and other natural features undisturbed for others to enjoy.

Those who follow you will appreciate it if you leave no sign of your presence, especially harlequin ducks seeking a safe place to rear young in pristine Alaskan rivers like the Unalakleet.

—Teresa McPherson



Study Area

More about harlequins

- The harlequin's Latin name, *Histrionicus*, is derived from "histrio," meaning stage player.
- The harlequin is a small duck, roughly half the size of the average mallard.
- Male harlequins are called drakes. Nesting females are called hens.
- The hen lines her nest with white down, a trait more typical of cavity-nesting birds than ground-nesting waterfowl.
- Incubation of harlequin eggs takes about 30 days, somewhat longer than most sea ducks.
- Hens take their young to secluded streams within 24 hours of hatching, where they learn to search for aquatic insects and larvae.
- The adult harlequin primarily feeds on marine invertebrates (crabs, clams, mussels, shrimp, and snails).
- Males lose their colorful plumage during molt, so it's hard to distinguish males from females in the fall.
- The Aleutian Islands are home to the largest winter population of harlequins in Alaska. Each spring the ducks migrate to Interior rivers like the Unalakleet to nest.
- More than 200 harlequin ducks were found dead in Prince William Sound following the 1989 oil spill, and many more probably perished throughout the spill area. According to the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council, harlequins in the Sound continue to show evidence of hydrocarbon exposure today.

Short summers keep scientists on the go

The days may be long, but Alaskan summers are short. Each year BLM biologists, botanists, archaeologists, hydrologists, realty specialists, geologists and surveyors around the state must pack lots of fieldwork into 90 days or less.

This summer, specialists at BLM's Anchorage Field Office measured the proper functioning conditions on the Anvil River drainage, a critical chum salmon stream.

Ongoing mountain goat surveys at Haines will help scientists evaluate impacts of helicopters on goat populations.

Other specialists completed wilderness and wild and scenic river inventory work in the Haines area, throughout parts of the Aleutians, and in west Cook Inlet.

This winter, BLM scientists and specialists will analyze this information to add to several databases, such as the Geographic Information System. GIS is a computer-based system for collecting, storing, and analyzing resource information linked to specific geographic locations. Land managers will use this information to help guide decisions that affect those resources.

Much of the data collected will also be incorporated into the Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan and future resource management plans for other parts of southcentral Alaska.

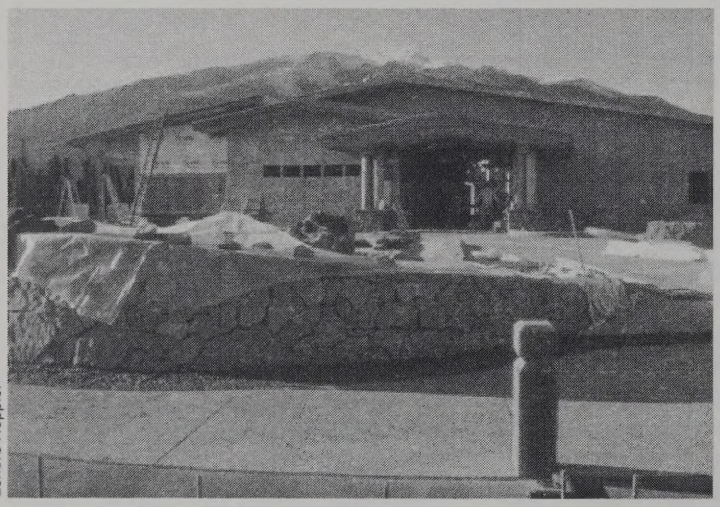
Frontier Flashes

News from around Alaska

UMIAT. BLM has authorized a disposal site for contaminated soil from oil wells in Umiat, an exploration camp on the North Slope. Contractors for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) recently removed the soil from several old drilling sites eroding into the Colville River. The soil, contaminated with petroleum and drilling muds, was transported to containment cells, where it awaits incineration and final disposal. On September 16, BLM personnel visited the site and designated the nearby SeaBee pad and reserve pit as an acceptable disposal site. The incineration units are already on-site, and Alaska DOT is eager for the cleanup work to proceed. However, COE said it lacks the funds to complete the project.

Donna Gindle

ANCHORAGE. Cheryl Larsen, an instructor at BLM's Campbell Creek Science Center, demonstrates the effects of radiant energy to a student participating in Energy Day. October is National Energy Awareness Month.



Lenore Heppler

COLDFOOT. The new interagency visitor center in Coldfoot, now under construction, has a roof and walls, allowing work to continue this winter. Exhibits will be installed January through April so the building can be open at the start of the 2003 tour season.

NPRA. BLM's National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) bid assessment team completed its analysis of the bids submitted at the NPR-A lease sale June 3. The agency accepted all winning bids and awarded leases to six companies October 1. Bidders paid BLM $1.9 million for the first year's lease rentals plus an additional $63.8 million in bonus bids. These funds were deposited with the Minerals Management Service in Denver, Colorado, to be split 50-50 between the State of Alaska and the U. S. Treasury, probably in April. The companies will work with local BLM offices to get appropriate permits for exploring 60 tracts covering 579,269 acres in the northeast corner of the reserve.

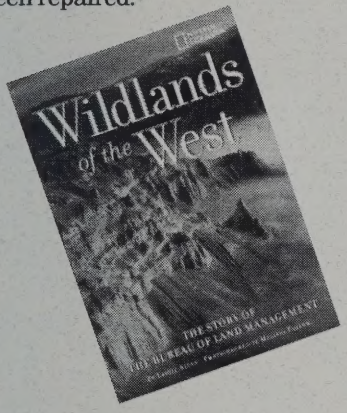
FAIRBANKS. Fairbanks Gold Mining Inc. (FGMI) has received permission from BLM to conduct geologic mapping on a 2,000-acre area within NOAA's land withdrawal adjacent to the Fort Knox Gold Mine, near Fairbanks. FGMI has expressed an interest in two additional phases of mineral exploration (soil sampling and exploratory drilling) in its efforts to add to mineable reserves at its Fort Knox mine.

BARROW. On September 24, 2002, BLM closed a public trail easement east of Barrow, Alaska, due to safety concerns over the unusually high number of polar bears in the area. The emergency closure came in response to requests from the North Slope Borough, the Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government and the Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation. Local officials expressed concerns about recent interactions between people and the estimated 60 polar bears that have converged on a pile of whale bones and carcasses near Point Barrow. The closure will expire in May when the bears no longer pose a safety hazard.

ELIM. BLM is cleaning up the Gerke site, an abandoned mine on public lands. BLM has arranged to repair some of the abandoned mining equipment, now federal property, and turn it over to the city of Elim for public works use. In addition, a BLM helicopter crew removed seven barrels of mining waste from the site this fall.

The Alaska Miners Association presented BLM with a reclamation award for its efforts at the Gerke site at its annual meeting in November in Anchorage.

FAIRBANKS. Contractors recently completed repairs to flood-damaged recreational facilities in Nome Creek, in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. Road and campsites at the Mount Prindle and Ophir Creek campgrounds needed extensive repairs where thick ice had blocked stream channels and diverted runoff last spring. The Cripple Creek Campground on the Steese Highway was also damaged by flooding but has now been repaired.

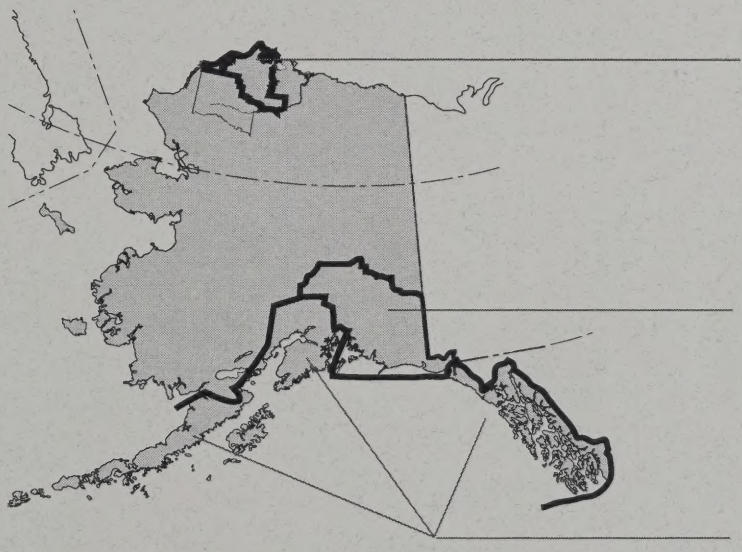


The August 2001 issue of *National Geographic* featured a major story on the BLM and its efforts to deal with multiple use of natural resources in the growing west. The NG staff generated so much material that the society decided to publish an entire book about BLM and the public lands. Last summer photographer Melissa Farlow visited Alaska and was pointed towards some interesting locations by BLM staff. The results are now apparent as the new book, *Wild Lands of the West*, authored by Leslie Allen and just released in November. "It's jam packed with incredible photos. I just couldn't put it down," said Sharon Wilson, a former North Pole resident now working for BLM in Washington, DC. The 200-page book will only be available to National Geographic Society members by mail order.

Frontier People

Greg Noble received the Department of the Interior's valor award at a national ceremony in Washington D.C. on Sept 4. Noble was recognized for coming to the aid of fellow passengers during an airplane crash at Nuiqsut in 2000 where five of 10 passengers died. Noble is a petroleum engineer with the BLM's Anchorage Field Office. Noble (left) is shown with Director of Operations Fran Cherry and BLM Director Kathleen Clarke (right) in Washington.

BLM's Associate State Director **Linda Rundell** has been named BLM State Director for New Mexico. Prior to moving to Alaska, she was district manager at BLM's Las Cruces Field Office. Now she will assume the top managerial position for BLM in the state. Rundell leaves Alaska in mid-December.



Planning Update

BLM planners will be very busy this winter making plans for the future of millions of acres of BLM lands in Alaska. Upcoming issues of **BLM-Alaska Frontiers** will include additional information on these efforts. The a draft plan and alternatives for the Northwest NPR-A will be released for public comment in late December. A full set of scoping meetings will be held beginning this fall for the Ring of Fire and East Alaska plans. Contact the team leaders to be placed on mailing lists to receive additional information as it becomes available.

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BLM-Alaska Frontiers is published quarterly in February, May, August and November.

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BLM-AK-GI-94-005-1120-912

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